

Chowilla Floodplain

2021 Environmental Regulator Operations



An operation of the Chowilla environmental regulator is being undertaken over winter and spring 2021, with the scale and duration of the watering subject to ongoing appropriate River Murray flows. Watering of priority wetlands over the last two years has achieved excellent outcomes, however given the time since the last extensive floodplain inundation in 2016 there has been a general decline in the condition of vegetation and the broader floodplain is in need of a drink.

Ideally there would be a large natural high flow to create flooding across the floodplain. In the absence of that, the operation of the Chowilla regulator in 2021 will enable managed inundation across up to approximately a third of the floodplain area. Some targeted wetland watering through pumping may also occur.

Operation of the environmental regulator to create inundation across large areas of the floodplain, connects up waterways with wetlands, allowing aquatic vegetation to flourish, providing feeding and breeding habitat for birds and amphibians, and enables the movement of carbon and nutrients from the floodplain to the River to support foodwebs. The operation will provide improved soil moisture conditions within creek banks and across wetlands and floodplains, improving tree and understorey condition and supporting regeneration of floodplain vegetation.

Operation of the Chowilla Creek regulator

The scale of operation of the Chowilla Creek regulator is dependent upon the level of River Murray flows into SA. Under lower flow conditions only a lower level operation of the regulator will be undertaken, however if River flows continue to increase during late winter or early spring then the scale of the operation will increase to generate broader scale floodplain inundation.

The planned regulator operation will raise water levels in the floodplain creeks by up to between 2.6 and 3.5 metres above normal levels potentially inundating 2,000-6,500ha of floodplain and wetlands.

Lock 6 weir pool will be raised by up to 42 centimetres above normal pool level. This is important to enable the management of water quality and help to protect critical flowing habitat for native fish including the Murray cod.



Chowilla Floodplain - Modelled Inundation Extent
Medium Level Operation of the Chowilla Regulator



In-flows to the Chowilla creek system will be managed through the inlet weirs on Pipeclay and Slaney creeks to ensure that flowing habitat for native fish in the Chowilla creeks is maintained during the regulator operations. The settings on the inlet weirs are managed by SA Water so that the fishways can operate effectively to attract and pass fish and to increase flowing water habitat within the Chowilla creeks as the River Murray flow conditions change to ensure.

If River Murray flows drop away so that the higher targeted level of operation of the regulator cannot be undertaken then some pumping to priority wetland sites across the floodplain may still be undertaken.

This could include watering of up to 12 priority wetland and floodplain sites which provide important refuge habitat for a range of plants and animals.

Game Reserve and boat access during the operation

The Chowilla Game Reserve will remain open where possible to the public during the 2021 operations. However, depending on the scale of operation a number of campsites and access tracks will be closed during the period of operation.

Boating

The regulator on Chowilla Creek will be closed to boat passage during the operation. Small boats (tinnies) moving up Chowilla Creek from the main river will only be able to move up as far as the regulator. Boating access will also be possible if a low level operation is undertaken upstream of the regulator, with a designated launch site available at Campsite 13. Small boats can also be launched at other campsites where it is safe to do so. The Customs House boat ramp, on the southern side of the River Murray, will be available as usual.

Water craft such as kayaks and canoes can be carried around the Chowilla Creek regulator but it is a significant structure so you need to be prepared to carry boats for approximately 300 metres. Portage for kayaks and canoes is also possible around the smaller weirs at Pipeclay and Slaney Creeks along the existing tracks.

It is important to note that for safety reasons, access on all of these structures is NOT permitted under any circumstances.

Due to the raised water levels above the Chowilla regulator during the event, vessels should navigate with caution when in the vicinity of, or travelling under bridges, and when navigating near the river banks, as elevated water levels may limit passage beneath the bridges, increase the width of shallows and submerge hazards near the banks in some places.

Vehicles

Where possible, the public access tracks and roads on the Chowilla floodplain will remain open during a low to mid-level operation, however some may be restricted to 4WD access only. If a larger scale event is undertaken this could result in campsite and road closures, further information will be available on the National Parks and Wildlife SA webpage.

It's important to remind visitors to Chowilla Game Reserve to stay on public access tracks and adhere to park signage. It is an offence to drive off-road or leave formed tracks in any park or reserve. We encourage park visitors to proceed with caution on tracks they are unfamiliar with, and not to enter any flood waters.

Campsites

A number of campsites will be closed during the operation. **Remember to book before you go. To confirm the availability of campsites and purchase campsite permits online, please visit [National Parks and Wildlife Service South Australia](#) or call (08) 8595 2111.**

For further information about Chowilla

Email: chowilla@sa.gov.au **or** **Visit:** [Department for Environment and Water | Chowilla Floodplain](#)